

PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

3-20-2013

HB 6645 – Compassionate Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Patients

Committee Chairpersons, members of the Public Health Committee: My name is Bill O'Brien from Wolcott and I am president of the Connecticut Right to Life Corporation. A couple of other members of my organization have presented testimony about problems with the supposed safeguards of the bill as proposed. My purpose in testifying today is to make clear that we are opposed to this bill in principle, no matter what supposed safeguards may be written into it.

First, we sympathize with those who see their illness or disability as a burden, particularly if they are in pain, whether that pain is physical, psychological, spiritual or otherwise.

Studies suggest some people decide that their life is no longer worth living because they are in pain, others, because they are depressed. Still others, because of a loss of autonomy. In one study from the Netherlands, physicians reported the two most common reasons cited by patients requesting euthanasia were "avoiding loss of dignity" and "unbearable or hopeless suffering."

We realize we could be in their position someday. Some of us may be in that position today.

Yet, we cannot agree with the solution proposed by this bill. Rather than prescribe death as the all-purpose solution – and, quite frankly, none of us knows for certain what awaits us on the other side of death – for those who are living, we need to help the hopeless regain hope, those who feel undignified, to maintain or regain their dignity, those who fear losing their autonomy, to maintain some degree of control, we need to help relieve a person's depression, to relieve a person's pain. None of those prescriptions may be easy, but they are the really compassionate alternatives to assisted suicide.

As for our reasons for opposing this bill, the first reason is that in ancient times when it was the physician who healed and the sorcerer who killed, the physician and the sorcerer were often one and the same person. That changed after Hippocrates, who lived around 400 B.C. when physicians began to take an oath to "Do No Harm." This bill would take medicine back to the barbarity when doctors were killers. Who would go to a doctor anymore? Who could you trust? Many people already don't trust certain doctors with their own, or their relatives, healthcare.

Secondly, let's remember that those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it. The state has no business setting any categories that imply that some – quote - "life may not be worth living." HB 6645 assumes that some people who may be terminally ill would want to avail themselves of assisted suicide because their life is no longer worth living. Some would argue that this bill allows people to choose. However, it would be this committee that is choosing – in this case, only people who may be terminally ill make the cut. If this bill passes, no doubt next year, or the year after, another bill would be introduced to consider some other group, or groups, to be living lives not worth living, who also want to be allowed to choose assisted suicide. On what grounds will you deny them?

Certainly there are others who are in desperate straits, but who are not terminal, who believe their lives are not worth living. If you pass this bill this year, you will be on a very, very, very slippery slope.

According to an entry on Wikipedia, the expression "a life not worth living" first occurs in the title of a book written in German, and translated into English, called, *Allowing the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Life* written in 1920 by Karl Binding, a jurist, and Alfred Hoche, a psychiatrist. Both were college professors. HB 6645 allows a person to voluntarily request assisted suicide, which will be allowed by the state. Note that the book's title uses the word "allowing." No mandate in HB 6645, or in the title of that book.

But we all know how that book turned out. And it wasn't the Nazis who wrote the next ugly chapters. It was the elite, those who thought they could control death – the professors, like Binding and Hoche, psychiatrists and physicians, social workers, and government officials.

But as we know, in much less than twenty years after the publication of that book, those in Germany who were considered living lives not worth living included people who were brain damaged, mentally retarded, psychiatrically ill. Then it was people with disabilities. Then they expanded the categories to include homosexuals, interracial couples, political dissidents and criminals. But they didn't stop there. More categories were created to include "non-white" or non-Caucasian peoples, then Romani people. Then it was Communists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and some clergy. And, oh yes, did I mention the Jews? The genocide of six million Jews? That's when the Nazis were involved.

After Hitler was defeated, a Dr. Leo Alexander served with the Office of the Chief Counsel for War Crimes concerning the Nuremberg trials in Germany. He interviewed the physician defendants, German doctors who had been involved in practices such as euthanizing mentally handicapped Germans that led to the "final solution" for Jews and others.

Dr. Alexander wrote about the initial causes of the Holocaust in the July 14, 1949, issue of the New England Journal of Medicine. Dr. Alexander wrote, **"The beginnings were merely a subtle shift in emphasis in the basic attitude of the physicians. It started with the acceptance, basic in the euthanasia movement, that there is such a thing as life not worthy to be lived."**

In 1984, shortly before his death, Dr. Alexander **warned that the same lethal attitudes were taking root in the United States.** He cited the rise of the "death with dignity" movement, which now advocates for assisted suicide -- doctors providing the means for patients to kill themselves -- as in HB 6645.

Dr. Alexander, recalling his research for the Nuremberg trials, said: "The barriers against killing are coming down."

Is this committee going to legalize assisted suicide, starting our state down the slippery slope that leads to genocide? The Connecticut Right to Life Corporation opposes HB 6645 and assisted suicide for the same reasons that it opposes genocide – it is the killing of human beings, and, even if it starts simply by allowing only some people to kill themselves, as we have seen, there is no reason not to believe that it, too, will also lead to genocide.